

Bob Chenoweth: The following oral history interview was conducted by Bob Chenoweth for the National Park Service on December 6, 2001, at 10:00 P.M. The person being interviewed is John Stanley Lopinsky, and he was a Private First Class, First Class Specialist at Hickam Field. He was with the 12th Signal Platoon, which was attached to the 17th Airbase Group. He was a Signal Corp-- he was in the Army Signal Corp, not in the Army Air Force. John, for the record, uh.. please state your full name, place of birth, and date of birth.

John Stanley Lopinsky: John Stanley Lopinsky. Uh.. date of birth, 8 March 1919, Cranberry, West Virginia.

Bob Chenoweth: What did you consider your home town in 1941?

John Stanley Lopinsky: F- uh.. uh.. you got me actually, go back uh.. Somerley, West Virginia.

Bob Chenoweth: Somerley, West Virginia, okay. What were your parents' names?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. Stanley is my father and Victoria is my mother.

Bob Chenoweth: How many brothers and sisters did you have?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Three brothers-- uh.. three sisters, one brother.

Bob Chenoweth: Where did you go to high school?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Oak Hill, West Virginia.

Bob Chenoweth: Uh.. did you a- attend any college prior to your military service?

John Stanley Lopinsky: No.

Bob Chenoweth: Where and when did you enlist in the Army?

John Stanley Lopinsky: I enlisted, I guess, I enlisted in Martinsburg, West Virginia, in October '40, '41, I don't remember. I-- wait a minute, I got it-- might have it on my discharge here. I got a little- I got a little discharge thing. I don't remember that small step. <laughs> Let's see, I think I might-- I- I know I- I did have it. I got so much junk in there. Uh.. and there-- here it is. Uh.. I can't see it. Can you see if you can? <laughs>

Bob Chenoweth: Oh my goodness. No you're going to have to have better eyes than I've got to...

John Stanley Lopinsky: <laughs>

M1: I'll look.

Bob Chenoweth: Okay.

John Stanley Lopinsky: There you go.

M1: In this bright light now, and boy...

John Stanley Lopinsky: Martinsburg I- I know where that I was s-...

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well I sounded like when you were talking to me before, you must have come in, in 1940.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Forty.

M1: Five August 1940?

Bob Chenoweth: Five August 1940.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Five August, yeah. Mm-hm.

Bob Chenoweth: Okay.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah, I remember that now. Now, after you tell me. Yeah, yeah.

Bob Chenoweth: Okay, after you enlisted, tell me a little bit about your service prior to coming to Hawaii, your training and everything.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah, I b- uh.. before getting in the Army?

Bob Chenoweth: No, after you joined.

John Stanley Lopinsky: After, after.

Bob Chenoweth: Yeah.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, as I said, I uh.. enlisted in Martinsburg, West Virginia. They in turn shipped me to uh.. Baltimore when I was sworn in, in Baltimore, and then in turn they sent me up the river, so to speak, to Fort Slocum, New York. And from Fort Slocum, I came over here.

Bob Chenoweth: What did-- what kind of training did you have at Fort Slocum?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. well I had about a week of uh.. little drill, not <inaudible> just...

Bob Chenoweth: Uh-huh.

John Stanley Lopinsky: ...just drill.

Bob Chenoweth: So you actually took your basic training once you came to Hawaii? Is that right?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well you might say that, there was never-- I that-- that little bit up in uh.. Hickam uh.. not Hickam, uh.. New York, was about all I had. When I see-- when I come here, went right to work. Yeah, they put me with a Buck Hoffmeyer [ph?], a s- a Sergeant. Oh...

Bob Chenoweth: Tell me about your coming over to Hawaii, how did you actually come?

John Stanley Lopinsky: U.S.A. T. Republic [ph?], or Army Transport.

Bob Chenoweth: Army Transport.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh-huh.

Bob Chenoweth: And did you leave out of San Francisco?

John Stanley Lopinsky: 'Frisco, yeah.

Bob Chenoweth: Yeah. Fort Mason?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, we left uh.. New York, uh.. come down the river and went through the canal then to 'Frisco and then to Hawaii.

Bob Chenoweth: Oh. I see.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah.

Bob Chenoweth: I see.

John Stanley Lopinsky: The scenic route.

Bob Chenoweth: Uh-huh.

John Stanley Lopinsky: <laughs>

Bob Chenoweth: So when you got here, <inaudible>

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah.

M1: Okay.

Bob Chenoweth: Okay. When you- when you got to Hawaii, you were telling me before about how you ended up at Hickam Field.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh-huh.

Bob Chenoweth: Could you tell me that again? How- how was that?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, like I said, the greenhorn over there, and then the guys hollering, "Football players, basketball players, and baseball players." So I naturally played baseball, and I got in that line. I uh.. but like I told you before, I thought I was going to Shafter, but I wound up at Hickam.

Bob Chenoweth: Why did you think you were going to Fort Shafter?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Because that's what I was told in- at the recruiting station. That's what they told me.

M1: <Inaudible>

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. when uh...

Bob Chenoweth: The watch.

M1: The watch.

Bob Chenoweth: Your uh.. the watch is clicking on the...

John Stanley Lopinsky: Oh.

M1: If you'd just like to...

John Stanley Lopinsky: God damn, I'm- I'm tough.

M1: You are.

John Stanley Lopinsky: <laughs>

M1: If you'd like to slip it off, then you're free to move your hands around.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Okay. Uh.. that uh.. anything you say, I'm just one of the boys.

Bob Chenoweth: All right.

John Stanley Lopinsky: All right. <laughs> Now...

Bob Chenoweth: Just that technical stuff again.

John Stanley Lopinsky: <laughs>

Bob Chenoweth: So- so when you-- actually when you enlisted, then you enlisted expecting that you would be sent to Hawaii to Fort Shafter?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah, that is correct.

Bob Chenoweth: Did you have an idea when you enlisted what kind of duty you wanted?

John Stanley Lopinsky: No.

Bob Chenoweth: I see.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Not really. Not really. I just uh.. I tell you why I wanted Hawaii. My brother was in Hawaii.

Bob Chenoweth: <Inaudible>.

John Stanley Lopinsky: He spent uh.. three uh.. three years I no back then they, two years double time. And he was at Fort DeRussy.

Bob Chenoweth: I see.

John Stanley Lopinsky: And that's-- so and he told me all these fine stores about Hawaii.

Bob Chenoweth: So was he in the Coast Artillery?

John Stanley Lopinsky: I...

Bob Chenoweth: At Fort DeRussy, was he in the Coast Artillery?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yes.

Bob Chenoweth: I see.

John Stanley Lopinsky: He was in Coastal Artillery at Fort DeRussy.

Bob Chenoweth: Uh-huh.

John Stanley Lopinsky: And he- he kind of sold me on Hawaii.

Bob Chenoweth: So you get down to Hickam, and they told you your primary duty was going to be playing baseball. Could you tell me about that?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, they uh.. n- n- not- not in so many words.

Bob Chenoweth: I see.

John Stanley Lopinsky: They-- like I said, I was uh.. working on the phone, telephones installing all that, but I was free to play baseball. That was- that was- they uh.. they-- let's say they didn't-- they wouldn't bitch if I played baseball.

Bob Chenoweth: Right, okay.

John Stanley Lopinsky: That's what it was.

Bob Chenoweth: Tell me a little bit about the actual telephone work that you were doing. What- what did that involve?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well- well, we uh.. installed sh- and sh- we shot trouble, any of the trouble, we'd go in the morning, get the trouble tickets if I was working uh.. sh- uh.. repair, get the trouble tickets and go all over the base, fix from that. Or if someone wants some coming in, a new phone, they'd put them in. They worked- worked for the- worked installing by the-- installing, troubleshooting. And I did uh.. I wired <laughs> that's a- there's a quite a job. They wanted us to wire the Hawaiian Air Depot. They had one uh.. twelve- twelve pair box. But they wanted about 100 phones. <laughs> And I said, "Well wait a minute now, something's wrong." Well the guy was good. He uh.. the uh.. foreman or whatever said, "What you need?" I said, "I need a hole in this wall and box to..." I would say how many pair, I don't remember, uh.. 50 pair, 40 pair. He said, "Don't make them that width, so two." And then they- then they'd wired every- they ran the wire and I'd put the phones in, help my men, my crew.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah. That was the, uh.. that was the job, big job.

Bob Chenoweth: You also mentioned that there was a- a- a big switchboard, a new switching board, yeah?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, no. Yeah, I said uh.. that the- the switchboard-- not the switchboard, the mainframe.

Bob Chenoweth: The mainframe.

John Stanley Lopinsky: All the phones-- that was the first and latest out at that time, at Hickam they got it, the first one. I think it-- whether it Western Electric or who-- Bell, whoever.

Bob Chenoweth: Uh-huh.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah, that was the- the original-- that's the first one, that new model that- that's where it went.

Bob Chenoweth: Where- where abouts was that mainframe put? What building?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. headquarters.

Bob Chenoweth: Yeah.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Headquarters they had-- well you go in the main there, uh.. in the back, uh.. back there was a-- it wasn't a big place, the main- uh.. the- the mainframe was, uh.. room was a pretty good size. But the switchboard was, well it was just a little place.

Bob Chenoweth: Oh.

John Stanley Lopinsky: And- and we had operators that uh.. take the overseas calls-- and well, matter of fact, I worked 'em a little while because I got \$10 a month. <laughs> That added to \$21 made \$31.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yeah, so.

Bob Chenoweth: So tell me a little bit about your baseball.

John Stanley Lopinsky: The baseball? That- that's my game. I'll tell you. Well- well, like I said I went down there and tried out. George Bushy [ph?] was the catcher and Applong Anderson [ph?], I guess he was a Master Sergeant, was the manager. So uh.. Bush [ph?], Warrant Officer Bush, in my outfit said, "Go down if you want to try out." Like I told you, two of us Herman Chat [ph?] and I, I made the team as a pitcher. H- Herman didn't make it. And uh.. and we had a pretty good ball team.

Bob Chenoweth: You were telling me that you uh.. the team often traveled to the outer islands to play games.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Yes, oh yes. Well, uh.. like I said, we-- I-- that's the way I got to see all the islands, th- through baseball. I liked this playing out-- they'd big luau all old Cooley [ph?] he could <laughs> he could drink-- <laughs> he will tell you that was good trip. Yeah. We made 'em, about all of them.

Bob Chenoweth: Could you tell me story about going up to Fort Shafter when all the trucks were down?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Pardon?

Bob Chenoweth: You had told me before about going up to-- I'm sorry, to Schofield barracks to play...

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh-huh, oh yeah.

Bob Chenoweth: ...when all the trucks were down.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Oh, yeah. Or uh.. that they grounded all the trucks and there was no transportation that day, so uh.. Major Swansky [ph?] I think he said, "Well they didn't ground the airplanes." So we uh.. take down to the-- go down to the field, load the team up there. Fly to Wheeler Field and walk from Wheeler to Eleventh Signal Barracks at Schofield. <laughs>

Bob Chenoweth: And why type of aircraft did you fly up there in?

John Stanley Lopinsky: I think it's a C33.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Them sharp nosed-- yeah, sat on the floor, no actually, bucket seats-- I don't remember, but, yeah, we got all the gear and then away we went, walked from Wheeler up there.

Bob Chenoweth: Where were you billeted at Hickam?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Where- well at first, we had this-- they had four-man huts, oh, in where the parade ground is there uh.. where the consolidated barracks is now, they had four-man huts over there. They had uh.. I guess about 25 of 'em and we-- four men- manned- stayed in those huts.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Then- then they moved us down to the uh.. uh.. the old- they had a schoolhouse down at-- by the water tower, and they moved us down in that, that area. And then uh.. we went up to the Consolidated Barracks, some of us. For a while, I don't remember h- and I uh.. I think that's where I was-- no I was down there when the bombs uh.. but we uh.. three places there, I know, Consolidated Barracks, which now is, I guess, Headquarters for all the Seventh Air Force.

Bob Chenoweth: Right, right, <inaudible>. Tell me what you were doing on December 7th, on Sunday morning and- and what happened to you that day.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well- well like I was just say I- I dreamed about it. I dr- had a dream of the planes of uh.. dropping bombs. So I got up early, showered, shaved, and I was ready to go. And uh.. when uh.. when they hit. So I- we- we had practiced this. We knew what our duty station was. So I went up to headquarters and- and uh.. worked till nine o'clock that night.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. uh.. fixing phones, stringing field wire, and things.

Bob Chenoweth: When you got ready to go, did you see the attack as it was happening? Uh...

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. well...

Bob Chenoweth: W- what made you aware that uh.. that there was attack?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well you see that- uh.. uh.. see that plane going down the hanger line with that big meatball on it, I knowed damn well that was no-- well, see the Navy- the Navy would uh.. bomb us, flare bombs, we'd-- I uhm.. I would assume our people bombed them, so back and forth on Sunday. But when I saw that meatball, I said, "That's no-- that's no Navy." And I knew it was the real thing.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm. And you immediately went to the headquarters.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Went uh.. went to headquarters where our uh.. uh.. duty stations.

Bob Chenoweth: Now was the communication system-- was the telephone system damaged at all in the attack?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Some. Not- uh.. not uh.. not in total.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: But uh.. i- it had a few uh.. a few calls that they didn't have it, but that was people that lived near the hanger line around there for stray bombs, I guess, and everything. But uh.. not uh.. not as- not as much as you'd- one would think.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: But uh.. we did uhm.. I remember the bomb uh.. out the bomb dump, they had a problem. I don't know whether-- what. But they didn't- they didn't hit the bomb dump. It didn't blow it, anyway.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: And uh.. so...

Bob Chenoweth: But they lost communications.

John Stanley Lopinsky: But they lost their c- yeah, it could have been because they was out in the boonies, uh.. you know, out in the boondocks, and uh.. way out and uh.. probably uh.. maybe tore a line down somewhere.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh-huh.

Bob Chenoweth: What did you think? What did you think about this?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. well uh.. <laughs> I- I guess go back-- the- the a clipper used to come into Pearl there...

Bob Chenoweth: Uh-huh.

John Stanley Lopinsky: ...land. And I had read in the paper, about the- uh.. the Honolulu paper about Nomura coming over. And I, as I told you earlier, I had that little telephone truck and I could go anywhere I to-- pass I could go anywhere. So I said, "Well, shit, I'll just-- I'll go down there and see what he's going to say." And I was close to him as-- yeah _____ grinning all big. "We're going to straighten this all out, nothing- nothing going to happen." What he did, went to Washington and talked to one, then broke off with everything. Yeah, never can-- I r- I remember him.

Bob Chenoweth: So you saw him when he came in on the clipper, huh?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Clipper, yeah, I was-- like I say, I was within 6 feet of him.

Bob Chenoweth: Wow.

John Stanley Lopinsky: He was grinning with them big buck teeth and-- yeah, yeah.

Bob Chenoweth: So after the attack was over, how long did you stay at Hickam, and what did you do after the attack?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, went uh.. well, went back to pretty much to normal uh.. after they uh.. d- s- well, see at first, they thought that they were going to have another attack and they were going to land. We heard all the-- all the rumors in the world that they're landing on the North Shore, that they're here and everything. But like I said, it only-- just nor- uh.. rumors.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: And uh.. so we uh.. w- when they- well naturally, you know everybody's shook up, they're going to kind of remember them, but hoping they're not true.

Bob Chenoweth: Yeah.

John Stanley Lopinsky: And they never did bother us anymore. So things pretty much uh.. uh.. back to normal as far as work and uh.. things.

Bob Chenoweth: Now at some point <audio gap>

John Stanley Lopinsky: <laughs>

M1: Okay, rolling again.

Bob Chenoweth: Okay. Eventually you left Hawaii.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Right.

Bob Chenoweth: When was that?

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. all-- let's see. Well uh.. no. Because I was-- as I told you out there, I was- I was on the transport Christmas, so it must have been December. Yeah, I was on the transport in the middle of the ocean and there.

Bob Chenoweth: And that was in December of 1942.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Two.

Bob Chenoweth: So you stayed another year at...

John Stanley Lopinsky: About a year or so, uh-huh.

Bob Chenoweth: And very briefly, tell me what you did when you went back to the mainland.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, went to Santa Ana, California, at the cadet preflight school where it is about-- I uh.. about I don't know, 10 weeks or so. Then uh.. then they sent me to Tillary [ph?] Field for primary training in- in flying.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, as I said, uh.. soloed, took my gr- cross-country solo, all that and then it uh.. then they washed me, washed out. I- well as I told you back there again, I think they were getting filled up with better people better qualified maybe than I.

Bob Chenoweth: Mm-hm.

John Stanley Lopinsky: But uh.. I g- so I said, "Well, I'll..." They asked me, "What do you want to do?" I said, "I'll go back to my outfit." They <inaudible> 12 Signal no, you're Air Force. That's how I got in the Air Force. So then I went from uh.. then I went took phase training in Wyoming and went to Italy and as a radioman on the B24 flew 29 or 34 mission over there.

Bob Chenoweth: Tell me why there's this distinction between whether you flew 29 missions or 34 missions.

John Stanley Lopinsky: <Inaudible> 29 there were 34.

Bob Chenoweth: Uh-huh.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Well, I don't know. Uh.. <laughs> I- I told the chief, "H- how come there's a little discrepancy?" He said, "Well you uh.. they need uh.. need a radio operator you w- you would go, so." And- and as I told you, I said I told him the same thing. The sooner I got my 30 in or 34 or whatever it was, I'd go b- home. So I flew with a lot of greenhorns. <laughs> Scared the sh- poop out of you. <laughs>

Bob Chenoweth: Yeah. Okay. Thank you very much.

John Stanley Lopinsky: Uh.. well uh-huh. I guess.

End of Tape 428 John Stanley Lopinsky